MIGRATION IN COLONIAL SPANISH AMERICA

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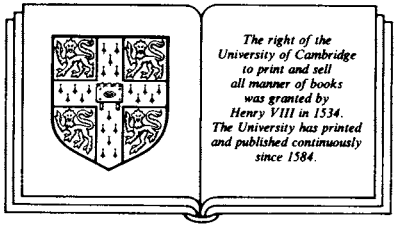

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Introduction: towards a typology of migration in colonial Spanish America

DAVID J. ROBINSON

Introduction

Migration was a ubiquitous phenomenon in colonial Spanish America. Wherever, and whenever one looks, one finds evidence of a spatially mobile society. Yet anyone attempting to study the process of migration will immediately confront a host of conceptual, methodological, technical, and terminological problems that probably explain why so relatively few have undertaken migration studies. In the same way that anyone leaving his proper, and fixed, place in colonial Spanish America immediately became socially suspect, so too anyone moving from one colonial jurisdiction to another creates major problems for the historical researcher.[1] Yet historical population movements are too important to be neglected, or to be allowed to deter research. Migration was one important way in which the very colonial world of Spanish America was created. The diffusion of Spanish immigrants throughout the continent,[2] spreading among other things their gospel, diseases and world view, triggered a migrational response on the part of the aboriginal Indians, only parts of which are we now able to outline in sketchy fashion.[3] Invasion and immigration for whites often meant retreat, and emigration for Indians. For the newcomers their "opening" of the continent resulted in a necessary "closing" of aboriginal worlds, the initiation of cultural assimilation or rejection, racial mixing, the onset of market economies and new trade patterns – in short a new phase in the development of social and spatial structures and processes throughout the continent.

Yet if migration was ubiquitous in colonial Spanish America, it was also highly differentiated. Each and every individual migrant moved for specific, and for us still obscure reasons. In the light of the past research, and the essays that are presented below, I shall attempt to typologize colonial migration, as a first step towards a better understanding of this most complex process. In so doing, of course, it will not be possible to cite all studies that have been undertaken that deal with migration, and I shall also attempt to

minimize overlap in citations with the authors of the other essays presented here. One of the most interesting aspects of preparing an overview of colonial migration is the discovery that almost every study concerned with colonial Latin America published in the past, be it on administrative structures,[4] the Church,[5] landholdings,[6] taxes,[7] population fertility[8] – all have some component or other related to migration. For all colonial analyses that involve people, or their relation to the land, the economy, or the society in which they lived, necessarily deal with their movements in space and time. Since everybody moved some distance during their lives, all colonial populations should theoretically be included in our analyses. Yet, of course, such a reality lies beyond our research reach at the present time. Only those who left a trail of evidence, or crossed boundaries important enough to be noted in the documentation of the time, or created serious problems for those charged with maintaining colonial rule, are recoverable. The many millions of migrants thus have to be represented by the few thousands that we can extract from the opaque colonial records. A most significant question has to be kept in the forefront of our minds as we thus interpret the analyses which follow: to what extent is it possible to establish at this point in time the representative nature of those migrants that have been studied to date? The consequences of that question should, I would argue, stimulate us to think in the broadest possible terms in relation to migration. If we are able to define the overall dimensions of the phenomenon of colonial migration, then at least we may be able to see how far we have come, and just how far we still have to proceed with our investigations. We need to think carefully about the nature and consequences of colonial migration, both from the viewpoint of the migrants themselves as well as the society at large in which they lived, and also the indirect and longer-term effects of shifts in population distributions. In that sense, colonial population migration is one of the most important historical antecedents in contemporary Spanish America.[9] One has only to examine a map of the current distribution of ethnic populations to understand that the colonial movements have been of enduring significance.

The contexts of colonial migration

Significant though migration was during the colonial period in Spanish America, its study poses major problems. As Mitchell has observed "the analytical obduracy of the phenomenon [migration] lies in the disjunction between the act of movement and the range of widely diverse circumstances which lead to it."[10] In short, the millions of individual decisions to migrate from one place to another, have somehow to be reduced to meaningful regularities of behavior. Though the first (and by no means easy) task is that of establishing the frequency, rate, direction and pattern of such movements, the fundamental issue is to attempt to answer the question of why regular

patterns of migration existed. The evidence for such regularities will be presented below, but here it is necessary to emphasize the importance of attempting to explain patterns of related individual migrations. We would also do well to remember that the patterns themselves, if we are careful enough in our analyses of the factors that underlie them, may turn out to be epiphenomenal.

In response to such problems, social scientists have developed several strategies of investigation that may help us in our study of the specific contingent conditions of colonial Spanish America. I shall not consider here the many general models of migration that have been developed by geographers, economists, demographers and others, since those have recently been analyzed.[11] Instead, several general approaches that will inform our considerations of colonial migration will be outlined.

The first of these is what one may call the "social field" approach[12] Here, the migrant is viewed as a member of a network of socio-economic linkages that acts as a set of constraints, or opportunities, that may promote or restrain the probability of migration. The migrant's decision is not viewed as an individual act, but rather as a socially-conditioned response to a set of circumstances. And obviously such circumstances varied in time and space. For the colonial migrants these networks would include those of kinship and god-kinship, relations between employer and employee, relations to supra-family cultural groups, such as *ayllus*, and communities, and of course the bonding with places, both sacred or merely beloved. What this frame of reference allows one to consider is the significance of the social context in which the potential migrant is embedded. We are not suggesting the applicability of notions of social physics, with individuals acting as social atoms. Rather the analogy here would be the individual as a constituent element of a cellular social structure, receiving and donating time, energy, friendship, love, loyalty, and material products. This approach stresses the web of social linkages that located each and every potential colonial migrant in a position relative to his or her neighbor.[13] The decision to move was thus one that was not to be taken lightly since it involved significant personal, familial and social costs. For this approach to be operationalized it will be evident that we need to know a great deal more about the social linkages in colonial society than is presently available.

A second approach adopts a more structural conceptual frame, arguing that any decision to migrate is based upon fundamental goals, for example, survival in the face of perceived risk, the desire to accumulate wealth, the achievement of social or self-ascribed status, and the need to maximize socio-economic opportunities. Since most populations resided within fairly constant settings that included natural resources, an economy, a social structure, communications, and administrative-legislative controls, the ability of individuals to achieve their goals was affected by such variable factors as

government policies, prices, access to land and employment, extreme natural (and man-made) events, the diffusion of technology, and the rate of economic and environmental change. The significance for us is that all of these factors were themselves spatially, temporally and socially variable. People in colonial Spanish America were confronted with a spatially fragmented opportunity/risk structure or surface. Since only the most powerful members of society could control, or even gain access to resources of many types over a wide area, necessarily, the individual or basic migrational entity had to resolve a set of complex calculations. Would it be better to move to escape taxation? Would a better job be available in the distant city? Would one be able to "lose" one's ethnic stigma by migrating to a region where the population in general was much darker-skinned? Would one's chances of economic opportunity be improved by risking the move to a newly-opened frontier zone of agriculture or mining? And, of course, the answers to all these and many other questions had to be judged within the context of one's relative social position. Was there somebody to help at the potential destination? Would a move have to be permanent, with the consequent loss of community membership, derived social status and that most valuable asset, land?

What this approach demands is a knowledge of those basic structural entities – the patterns of economic activity, the natural resource base, the system of communications available – that will permit us to better judge the cause of decisions to migrate, and equally significant the effects of migration. Unfortunately the knowledge available for most of colonial Spanish America, even in those microregions to which considerable attention has been paid, is still minimal. One has only to ask simple questions to realize how little we still know: how far would one have to travel from one's home to reach the nearest town of more than 5,000 inhabitants? How many times per month did travellers (merchants, muledrivers, etc.) reach the *haciendas* or *ranchos* of the Mexican *bajío*, or the mines of Nueva Vizcaya?[14] What were the patternings of landuse in Mendoza, Concepción, Caracas, or Morelos, and how did they affect regional labor demand?[15] How far did one have to travel to receive news of slave prices, or new royal legislation? Did one's community have the services of a priest, or could one depend at least upon a periodic visit to register long-buried bodies, baptize full-grown "infants," or marry parents?

These are all realistic issues in the context of colonial Spanish America, and seriously affect our ability to understand the key variables that must have affected the many decisions to migrate. Until we learn much more about the particularities of the spatial patterning of Spanish colonialism, our attempts at interpreting migration will be at best desultory.

Another approach in migration analysis is that of adopting the micro-view of the migrant, to attempt to understand migration through the experiences

of individuals, rather than to make deductions from the patterns derived from aggregate analyses. Here, the task is that of tracing individuals through their life-cycle in colonial space-time.[16] Like death, migration only exists after it has taken place, and thus the researcher is immediately confronted by the limitations of *post facto* analysis. Since we cannot know of the thoughts of those who considered the possibility of migration, and then took no action, even though they would have been an invaluable comparative study group, we thus have to confront the issue of how we are to select our individuals to study. Some might wish to proceed on the basis of a randomly selected migrant population, truly representative in a statistical sense. Others, more concerned with the richness of interpretation that may be derived from unrepresentative cases, might eschew statistical propriety and go for well-documented examples.

Another method would be to select ideal-types, and use each one of those to represent a social group. One can think of many such ideal-types: the young male immigrant to the colonies looking for a job and/or a rich widow;[17] the black slave escaping the injustice of his master;[18] the humble Indian lured to the prosperous mining camp;[19] the bored bureaucrat waiting to be transferred from a minor civil jurisdiction to a "civilized" post in a large city; the devout priest following a pattern of postings from village to village;[20] the adventurous *mestizo* traveling far and wide to hide a criminal record; the young maiden of high social status sent to live in a large house in one of the major cities of the colonies;[21] the Indian *cacique* moving on to a Spanish-held hacienda to reap the benefits of his social status and ability to control those less fortunate; the free *mulato* who decides to simply take off and explore for new agricultural lands in a frontier zone; the over-worked and over-taxed Indian who abandons his community to escape into unoccupied and uncontrolled territory, there to establish his own new, isolated subsistence farm;[22] the wealthy merchant who moves throughout the colonies negotiating loans, purchases, contracts, who has residences or contacts in dozens of towns;[23] and finally the drifter, the *vagabundo*, for whom there is no home, but rather the continual harassment of officials who enquire as to his race, his origins (as if he would tell!), and his past, but are never concerned with his future.[24] These, then, are just some suggested ideal-types that might well repay collective and more systematic study.

Types of colonial migration

Any analysis of colonial migration must take into account three critical dimensions: space, time, and the characteristics of the migrants. In attempting to understand such complexity it may be helpful to view these three dimensions in graphical form (Figure 1.1). In this diagram, we plot on three axes (thus grossly reducing multidimensionality) space, in the form of types

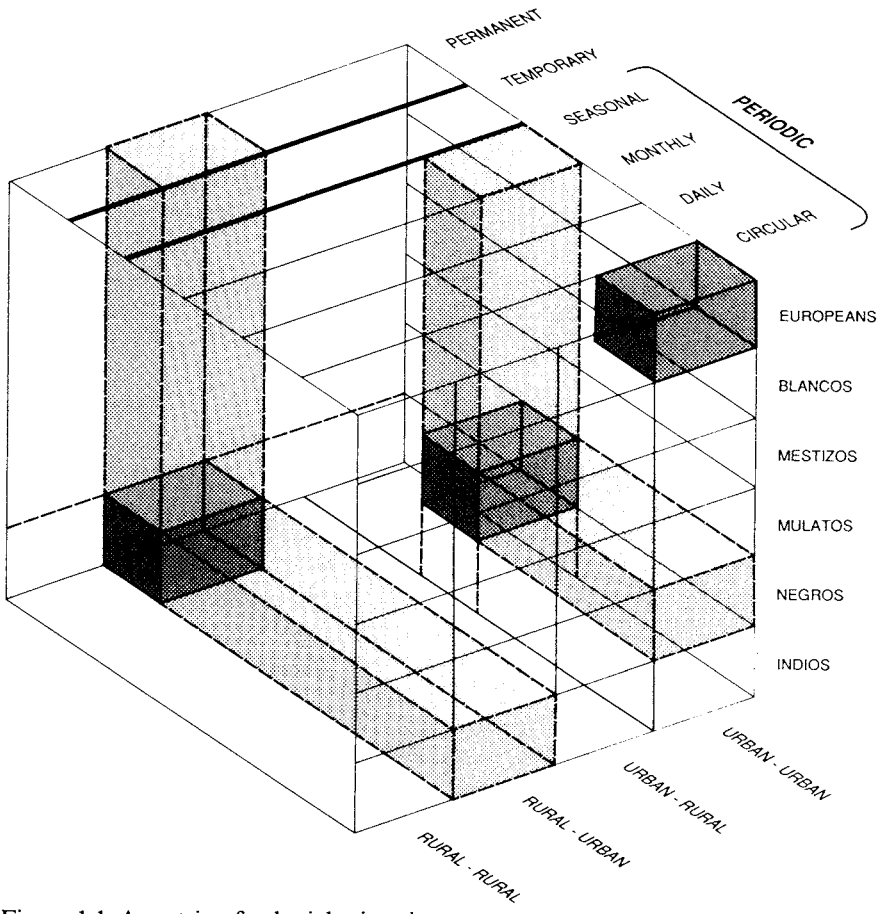

Figure 1.1 A matrix of colonial migration

of movement between settlements; time, in the form of temporal durations of migrant moves; and the characteristics of migrants, here only shown in simplified classes of racial types.

It should be apparent, however, that even within the confines of such a simplified schema, the theoretical types of migration that await study become numerous and exceedingly complex. The graphic isolates within the matrix three selected types of migration. The first is that of Europeans moving from one urban place to another in a circular fashion, classically the pattern of, say, a trader or merchant, or imperial official. The second identified group is that of negroes who also move between urban centers, but on a seasonal basis. These might well be representative of black slaves moved between the households of a wealthy colonialist. The third group identified are Indians

who are moving from rural to urban areas on a permanent basis: these could be found in large numbers all over Spanish America, especially in the later colonial period when, as Morse has perceptively observed, the colonial world became one of centripetal tendencies.[25]

If the migration matrix presented in Figure 1.1 serves any purpose it is, perhaps, that of forcing us to examine the nature of the dimensions represented along the margins of the cube. How can we adequately subdivide colonial space, time and individuals? Here, it will be evident I am suggesting that space is best thought of not in terms of linear distance (i.e. how far did a migrant move), but rather in a comparative systemic manner. If we wish to understand colonial migration as a process, I suggest that using the structure of the settlement system may be the best way of categorizing space. Here, therefore, the four migration options are between various combinations of rural and urban locations. Immediately, and quite properly, we have to consider if we yet are able to classify Spanish American colonial settlements in any such neat order. The answer, unfortunately, is a resounding no: very few regions have studies that identify with any technical rigor, the categories of settlements in which most of the population lived.[26] Of course, as might be expected, many will wish to debate the exact meaning of "urban" and "rural" in the context of the colonial world, and so it should be.[27] Surely the time has come to replace the formalism of *ciudad*, *villa*, *pueblo*, *rancho*, *hacienda*, *lugar*, *sitio*, etc., with some more constructive and functional meaning? Until that task is undertaken it will be difficult for us to be able to judge the significance of migrational moves in any directional and functional sense.

Beyond the minimal characteristics that need to be ascertained for each settlement type there remains the equally important task of determining the interconnections between settlements. Anyone who has been forced to use straight-line distance measurements in calculating migration patterns will surely have wondered exactly which way migrants really moved. Yet for Spanish America at large there are few analyses of colonial routeways and trails.[28] Even the official royal roads (*caminos reales*) have yet to be mapped, and anyone with a minimal knowledge of the physical geography of the region will realize that mules and horses, to say nothing of *llamas* and porters, could easily avoid these taxed trails. But if information and contacts used by migrants were established at regional fairs, or the local towns, then we have to know who walked along which routes, and who was at least likely to meet whom.[29]

Similarly one would expect that in the urban component of the settlement system, hierarchical order was very significant. To be in contact with the highest colonial authorities meant a very limited selection of migration destinations, normally the viceregal/*audiencia* capitals. But again, one has to remember that the colonial system of settlements evolved over a considerable

period of time, and that what we may identify as a patterning of functional central places in the eighteenth century, might have little meaning for the seventeenth. Since each and every region of Spanish America enjoyed its particular pattern of historical development, we shall generalize only at our peril.

The use, in Figure 1.1, of the terms urban and rural is also meant to suggest much more than the relative location of a migrant in a settlement. To move from one rural area to another rural area, or from an urban place to a rural zone, usually meant that one was shifting from one economic order to another. The "rural" in this sense meant a set of labor arrangements, a social world relatively distinct from that of the city.[30] Each of the spatial categories that one might wish to subdivide within, or add to, the matrix, should force one to consider in much more realistic terms, the empirical realities of colonial Spanish America.

If the categorization of colonial space poses problems, so too does colonial time. In Figure 1.1, the periodicity of migration is divided into relatively crude blocks of time. It is important to note that most migration studies now exclude circulation (i.e. migration that results in a return to an origin) from consideration within the strict purview of migration, but here are included all potential forms of migration to allow for a more comprehensive appreciation of the phenomenon.[31]

It can be seen that the first, and most important, division is that between migration that is permanent, and migration that is of some temporary form. Exactly what "permanent" and "temporary" mean, however, in the colonial context, remains to be investigated. It is important to note that in considering such concepts we are forced once again to reflect on such notions as "home," "residence," "belonging," "settling down," and being an "outsider," a "stranger," a "*conocido*" and the like (see McCaa below). For if time is to have meaning in our analyses it surely has to be conceptualized within the colonial context. As yet we do not know how long one had to live in a community to be socially "accepted," yet probably hundreds of thousands of migrants survived that experience. We do not know how long one could be "absent" before one lost one's community rights and duties. Such questions are essential in understanding the migration process for migrants undoubtedly were conscious of their social position and obligations at both their origins and destinations.

The periodic forms of migration shown on Figure 1.1 represent no more than a selection of possible types: the shift of workers to care for animals or special crops affected by the seasonality of climate;[32] the monthly trips to the large market center to pick up information or visit a friend or relative;[33] the daily round of visits to the local marketplace, or out to the fields;[34] the visits extending over several weeks or even months that took a travelling-salesman or a muledriver through a whole region, finally to return home.[35]